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SUBJECT: CHIEFS OF MISSION TOLD GOS IS COMMITTED TO DOHA TALKS

REF: A) KHARTOUM 786
B) KHARTOUM 372

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The GOS is committed to continuing the stalled Doha peace talks with the so-called "Tripoli Group" of Darfuri rebel factions, as well as increased participation from civil society groups, GOS lead negotiator Dr. Amin Hassan Omer. This message was delivered in Arabic and English at a hastily-convened MFA briefing for Chiefs of Mission and other senior diplomats. Local media, including several Sudanese television networks, covered the entire meeting. Blaming the collapse of the Doha talks squarely on what he claimed was the "intransigence" of the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Omer stressed that the GOS is, nevertheless, determined to pursue a cessation of hostilities and reach agreement on a political framework necessary for a comprehensive peace settlement for Darfur. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On July 6, more than three weeks after the suspension of bilateral peace talks in Doha between the GOS and JEM, the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) summoned Khartoum's diplomatic community to a hastily-arranged briefing on the talks' status. The DCM and Poloff attended the briefing, which was chaired by lead negotiator, Minister for Youth, Sport and Culture Dr. Amin Hassan Omer and heavily covered in its entirety by local media, including Sudanese television networks. Omer began the briefing by saying that while many aspects of the Doha talks' collapse had already been covered in the media, the GOS was eager to make clear to the international diplomatic community its intention to continue negotiations in Doha to find a peace settlement for Darfur.

¶3. (SBU) Omer stated that while the GOS is keen to pursue an immediate cessation of hostilities linked to a draft political framework, JEM has remained focused squarely on the issue of prisoner release throughout the latest round of talks in Doha. In an attempt to move forward, UN/AU Joint Chief Mediator Djibril Bassol had pushed for a concurrent approach in which the prisoner release issue was addressed while at the same time asking the two parties to submit ideas on a draft political framework. According to Omer, JEM refused to discuss either a cessation of hostilities or framework without a release of prisoners. But the GOS is loath to release prisoners without a cessation of hostilities, he said, for fear those released would reengage in JEM's armed attacks against the government.

¶4. (SBU) Omer noted that the February 17 Goodwill Agreement between the GOS and JEM calls for a timetable for prisoner exchange, rather than an immediate release. "But JEM was not talking about a timetable, just a release," he said. (Note: The half-brother of JEM Chairman Khalil Ibrahim is among the combatants detained by the GOS. End Note.) Refusing to budge, JEM then suggested a suspension of the talks until July, he said, which led to the resulting stalemate.

15. (SBU) The GOS is, nonetheless, excited about the prospects for a parallel track of negotiations with the so-called "Tripoli Group" of rebel factions (Ref B). Omer noted that Joint Chief Mediator Bassole and his team have received some "good indications" that under Libyan auspices, the Tripoli Group will soon achieve a common negotiating platform and be ready for discussions with the GOS in Doha. Though conceding that these movements "are not engaged in any real fighting" against the GOS, they were at least present in Darfur, he said, unlike the Chad-based JEM. He also noted that the Joint Mediation Support Team (JMST) continues to pursue the Paris-based Abdel Wahid Al Nur, despite his now legendary refusal to engage in peace talks before his lengthy demands for security are met.

16. (SBU) Omer also told the Chiefs of Mission and other senior diplomats that the GOS is strongly urging the Joint Chief Mediator and his team to engage with civil society actors, and bring them to Doha in a consultative capacity. These non-combatants possess a degree of political sophistication often found lacking in rebel armed movements, and the presence of civil society leaders is "another way to put pressure on the movements," said Omer. Omer concluded that lasting peace in Darfur will be possible only through engaging with civil society, reaching agreement with a broad spectrum of Darfuri rebel movements and finding ways to promote reconciliation between Chad and Sudan

17. (SBU) Comment: Omer's account of the suspension of the Doha talks is entirely consistent with that of JMST, which has characterized GOS conduct in Doha as generally very constructive in contrast with that of JEM. The question remains, however, whether the GOS has the political will and commitment to take any real

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actions to improve the situation on the ground in Darfur. The extensive media coverage of the Arabic/English briefing would seem to indicate that the latter was meant as much for domestic consumption as for the international community. The failure of last Fall's Sudan People's Initiative, which also received massive media coverage, demonstrates how the regime publicly promises much in regard to engaging Darfuri civil society leaders, but then delivers very little. Apart from SLA/Abdul Wahid, the myriad of Darfuri rebel groups has no broad, popular constituencies, and in the case of the Tripoli Group, no military strength either. For this reason, government concessions linked to talks with respected civil society leaders may represent an alternative path forward while efforts to broker a ceasefire continue.

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